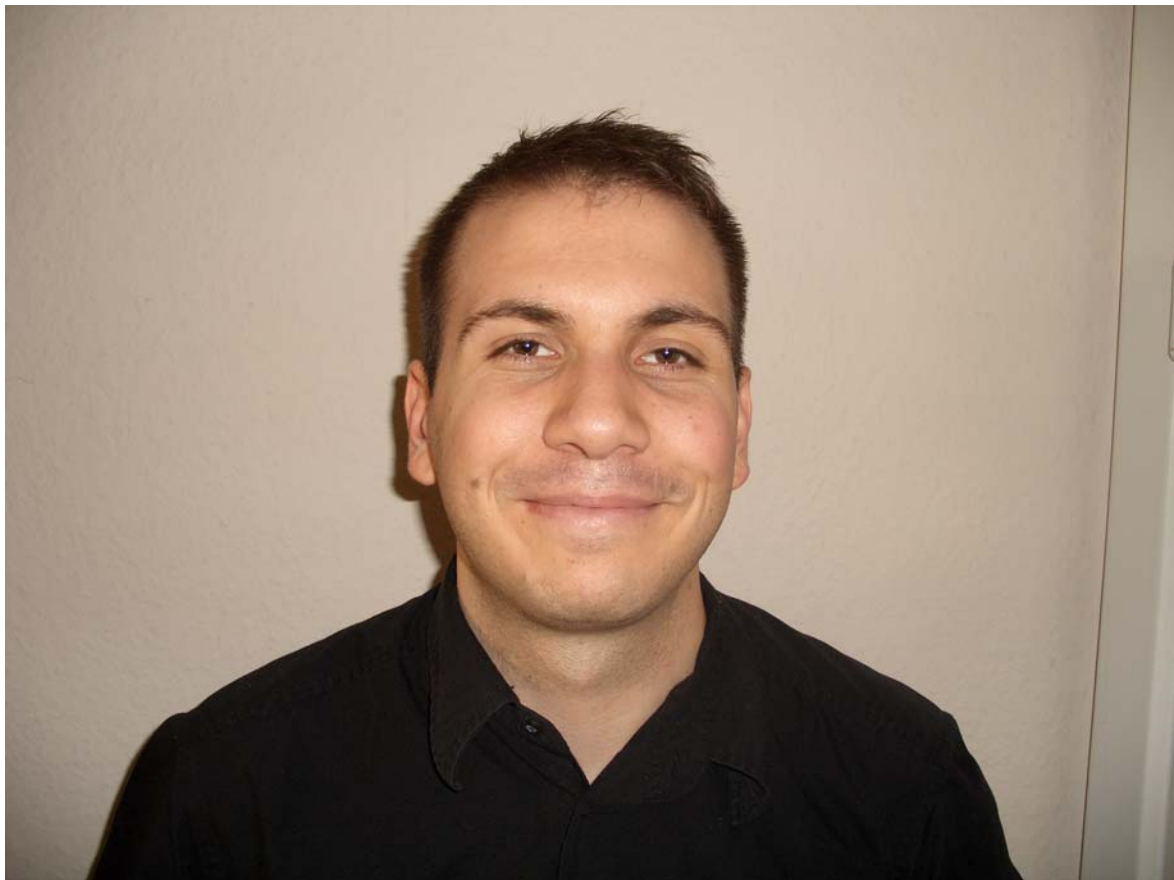


Global Imagined Community



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Imagined Community

In cultural and national theory the concept of nationalism is becoming increasingly defined as an imagined collective community and connection of people and groups (Anderson, 7). This definition stems from the theory that people in most communities do not have the possibility to meet every person. But by imagining our fellow “citizen(s)” through mediums such as newspapers and literature, people become aware of one another and that they are a part of a collective community with certain similarities and common interests (Anderson, 7). With the development of the on-going cultural phenomenon of globalization, the imagined community is broadening from a national to a

post-national level and a global imagined community is beginning to emerge. This article is interested in tracing and analyzing the relationship between global mediums, the emergence of the global imagined community, and how they are affecting the identity of Diaspora characters. How are post-national influences, i.e. new global mediums such as global telecommunication and the Internet, affecting the identity of Diaspora characters, specifically Samad and Magid, in *White Teeth*?

This relationship is interesting because the effects of global mediums are especially noticeable in Diaspora cases. Diaspora characters (immigrants) have moved trans-nationally and trans-continentially settling in new countries, thereby physically linking new homelands to their native ones. Due to the closer connectedness (from new home to native one) created by global mediums and the rapid growth of global migration¹, this link is being further intensified and shifting post-nationally (Held, 1999, 297-299).

Time and Space

An important part of globalization is the technological development which has occurred with communication in the last two to three decades. Trans-national telecommunication and the Internet have become viable tools in international communication, connecting countries and people together at a much faster rate than ever before (Held, 1999, 330). With the possibility of instantaneously sending information to one another from distant places on Earth, time has been compressed drastically between countries and people.

Information, ideas and news which before took weeks, months or years to travel from one location to another one (and to await a counter reaction which took an equal amount of time) have now been reduced to seconds and minutes (Held, 2000, 6). The result is that people are trans-nationally receiving information and news at a much faster rate, having a tremendous effect on their thoughts and actions. The compression of time in communication and the intensification of information and news traveling the world are creating new post-national settings and identities. The collective imagined community has become broadened from a national to a post-national global community.

¹ Data shows that migration is at an unprecedented level in world history and that migrants are moving more globally than ever before (Held, 1999, 297-299).

This is especially distinctive with Diaspora characters as they were usually very dislocated from their homeland. With the development of global communication interconnectedness Diasporas are given instant access to their homeland. Immigrants can watch events unfold live via satellite and keep instantaneous contact with siblings via international telecommunication and the Internet. Immigrants settled in foreign countries are becoming confronted with new post-national settings. International news segments about their homeland on everything from the political and historical development to weather changes and terrorist attacks are being followed as they take place. The compression of time in trans-national communication has therefore reduced the barrier of space that migrants have between themselves and their homeland and family. It has furthermore had an instantaneous alteration of how migrants behold their homeland compared to when they lived there (Held, 2000, 6-7).

Due to the developments in communication, migrants are experiencing confusion and disruption over their role as immigrants. Post-national settings leave immigrants in turmoil about who they are and what country (if any) and culture they belong to (Bhaba, 2-3). Immigrants have no clear distinction of themselves, being both dislocated from their new and old homes. Similar consequences of globalization can be seen with Diaspora characters in *White Teeth*.

White Teeth

In *White Teeth* Samad Miah and his sons are strongly affected by post-national settings, i.e. reduction in time and space. The phenomenon of globalization evolved tremendously during the end of the 20th century, having a great affect upon the characters in *White Teeth*. Samad is in *White Teeth* unaware of how barriers of space are being reduced due to post-national changes occurring trans-nationally between England and Bangladesh, particularly the adaptation of liberal doctrines i.e. western science and political and ideological values (Held, 1999, 339-340). Samad's ignorance of these changes allowed him to conjure an imagined romantic glorification of Bangladesh, as a country of origin where traditional and religious values have been maintained over decades, in a time where Samad believes moral decay is taking place in the West (Andersen, 7-8).

Samad has been unaware of how traditional Bangladesh heritage has been greatly affected by the spread of western liberalism and the adaptation of liberal doctrines, especially during the second

half of the nineteenth century (Held, 1999, 339). Western scientific and technological influence in Bangladesh, although unnoticed to Samad, affected Magid during his “re-education”. Magid has become a representative of Indian post-national scientific values, which are closer to the value system of western enlightenment than the traditions of Bangladesh or Islam (Giddens, 1-2) (Smith, 366-367). The effect of globalization on Magid has de-traditionalized him, undermining the influence from Bangladesh Samad imagined would alter his identity, and hopefully shape Magid into a model of a traditional Bangladesh Muslim (Giddens, 42-43) (Smith, 189-190). The return of a son from Bangladesh who aligns with western values is damaging to Samad’s identification with Bangladesh. Samad’s glorification of Bangladesh is shattered as his attempt to re-ignite his own identity through the re-education of Magid in “true” Islamic values fails (Smith, 208-209).

Global shrinkage has brought the relationship between the West and Bangladesh closer, influencing the development of Magid, which clearly has a damaging effect on Samad. It has threatened Samad’s identification, i.e. religious traditions, purity and morality, with Bangladesh and thereby his self-identity. Samad’s attraction to a traditional Bangladesh, albeit deeply hypocritical², is about sustaining Bangladesh roots and a heritage that Samad views as holier than his country of settlement, and a reaction against the changes western culture has on second generation Bangladesh immigrants in England (Hobsbawm, 11) (Smith, 190). Magid’s post-national development (western influence) has therefore left Samad lacking a foundation of an Islamic and Bangladesh nationalistic value system which he can identify with, in a time where Samad’s detachment as an immigrant in England is growing.

With the intense effect of globalization, trans-national immigrants such as Samad are displaced, as the two separate communities (England and Bangladesh) that they belong to are over-lapping into a post-national community that they don’t understand or want to be a part of. The result is that Samad, in disillusion, rebels (along with Millat) toward those that are a part of this new and to them confusing post-national community, i.e. Magid, Professor Marcus Chafren and western science, i.e. FutureMouse (Smith, 446-447). Whether or not the rebellious acts towards post-nationalism will achieve any re-emergence of traditional values for Samad and Millat, or immigrants from Bangladesh in general, is highly questionable. The rebellion is working along the assumption that

² Samad has acted (adultery) against the religious, moral and traditional values which he glorifies.

traditional values, i.e. identities, are being erased, perhaps even vanishing, and to defend these values a counter offense is necessary.

The paradox of this assumption is that an immigrant's history is inescapable (Smith, 466). The emergence of post-national settings creates new influences in society and upon people, but lacks the capacity to completely erase already existing identities or past historical or religious influences. The identity of Samad, yet in great turmoil about emerging post-national influences, is therefore ineradicable. Identities will always remain, but as an immigrant it will obviously be affected by several layers of trans-national and now post-national influences. Globalization will only continue as the intensification between people and countries continues on a previously un-scaled level, creating post-national relationships that are both new and complex. The identities of Diaspora immigrants, like Samad and Millat, who are rooted in traditions, will continue to be confused by these changes, as they now feel they neither belong to a specific national or post-national community.

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